

INFORMATION

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September 12, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

SUBJECT: CIA Analysis of Kosygin Visit to Peking

At Tab A is a CIA assessment of Kosygin's visit to Peking.

CIA believes the meeting was called by the Soviets and reflects Soviet concern that the Sino-Soviet conflict is hurting them.

CIA believes it is likely Kosygin sought to indicate to Peking that there was little possibility of an imminent devastating attack on Chinese installations but they could expect a strong reaction to further border provocations.

Attachment

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS
APPLY

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CIA ANALYSIS OF THE KOSYGIN-CHOU MEETING

There are few facts about the origin of the Kosygin-Chou meeting on 11 September, and none at all about its content or results.

Clearly it was arranged on short notice. When Kosygin left Hanoi, TASS announced that he had departed for Moscow. He made a brief stop at Calcutta and got as far as Dushanbe, in Soviet Central Asia, when his plane altered course and headed for Irkutsk. There it was met by a flight from Moscow which, after a brief stop, headed on for Peking.

The Soviets were the first to announce the meeting, saying the two sides "openly set forth their positions and held a conversation useful to both sides." The Chinese statement, coming a few hours later, was even more terse, saying simply that "frank talks were held" and revealing that the meeting took place at the airport.

Since the meeting, on 11 September, our monitoring has picked up no anti-Chinese polemics in the Soviet press and radio. The same is true for the Chinese radio, but two anti-Soviet press articles appeared on 11 September.

Possible Explanations:

There are several possible explanations for the unexpected and dramatic meeting. One is that the Chinese, well aware of the continuing Soviet build-up along their borders and apprehensive over the increasing speculation that Moscow intended to conduct a preemptive strike against their advanced weapons facilities, asked for the meeting in an effort to calm down their bellicose neighbor. This scenario seems highly unlikely, however. First reports indicate that Chinese propaganda against the Soviets is continuing even after the meeting. Had the Chinese proposed the talks and shown signs of apprehensiveness or fear, the Soviets would have demanded an end to such propaganda as a precondition to any easing of tension. Moreover, the Chinese communique on the meeting made it clear that Kosygin was treated with minimum respect during his brief visit -- he never even left the airport. This is hardly the kind of treatment he would have received if the Chinese had pressed for the meeting in order to arrange some sort of accommodation with Moscow.

Another possibility is that the Soviets pressed for the meeting in order to present the Chinese with some sort of ultimatum regarding the border. Although Moscow has recently issued stern warnings to Peking through their propaganda media, this explanation for the meeting also seems unlikely. The Soviets would hardly have to send their premier to the

Chinese capital to deliver such an ultimatum. Had this been their intention they could have effectively achieved their purpose by calling in the Chinese charge in Moscow and reading the riot act to him. Furthermore, Kosygin's abrupt reversal of his flight plans in order to reach the Chinese capital seems a rather humiliating prelude to the issuance of some sort of "final warning."

Still another possibility is that the meeting was not directly related to bilateral relations between the two countries but concerned Vietnam. The Chinese may have informed the North Vietnamese that they were cutting off all Soviet arms shipments to Hanoi, for example, and the Vietnamese might have then urged Kosygin to travel to Peking to iron this problem out. Or Hanoi, pointing to Ho Chi Minh's "will", might have again urged the two parties to attempt to compose their differences. However, the North Vietnamese have been urging the two sides to do exactly this for years -- with no effect. There is nothing in the present situation which would suggest that such advice would now fall on fertile soil. Moreover, when in the past the Chinese have created difficulties over Soviet arms shipments it has been the North Vietnamese themselves who have taken the initiative in straightening things out -- clear indication that Hanoi recognizes that it, rather than Moscow, can apply leverage on Peking in this matter.

Yet another possibility is that a large-scale, but unannounced incident recently occurred somewhere along the Sino-Soviet border -- an incident of such gravity that it required direct talks between the two premiers. This scenario would help explain the suddenness of the meeting in Peking, but it would not fit the pattern of previous major incidents occurring in the past year. Both sides have immediately publicized such incidents, and at this juncture neither side would have much motivation to conceal a new clash. Furthermore, a major clash would in all likelihood be

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It seems most likely that the initiative in calling for the meeting came from the Soviet Union. The Soviets probably believe:

(1) that the course of the Sino-Soviet dispute has reached a dangerous stage. It is hurting them on several fronts. The Chinese, they believe, are trying to "bleed them white" along the border. At the same time, the Soviets are being put at a disadvantage politically because their enemies and their allies as well believe them to be off-balance and on the defensive because of their preoccupation with the Chinese.

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(2) Kosygin could have gone to Peking either to issue a last direct warning to the Chinese to cease and desist or face the consequences. We think it more likely that, though he may have talked in uncompromising terms to the Chinese, he was trying to discover whether there was a way to bring the conflict down from its present risky level. The hiatus in propaganda, particularly if it should continue, would point in this direction.

(3) Kosygin may also have proposed further discussions, perhaps including the issue of frontiers. He would, in this case, have made it plain that there can be talk of reducing the potential for border clashes but there can be no question of ceding territory.

(4) Whether an easing of the conflict results from the meeting, the Soviets by sending their premier to Peking will have shown the rest of the world that they were willing to go the last mile toward seeking a solution.

In view of Soviet unease over reports of a preemptive strike, it is possible that Kosygin's sole purpose was to reassure the Chinese. We think it unlikely that this was the main element in Kosygin's visit. It is more likely that he sought, at one and the same time, to indicate to the Chinese that they were not under imminent threat of devastating attack but could expect a strong reaction if there were further trouble on the border.

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